

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Sequel, by Robert Wolf - - - - -
Poems, by Josephine Pollitt - - - - -
A Conservative, by Philip W. Furnas - - - - -
In Review: H. D. by Lindley Williams Hubbell - -
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Sequel

IN Acheron, the acerbated ant
Chanced, one prolonged Tartarean forenoon,
Upon that scatter-brained extravagant,
Still chattering his sempiternal tune,
And "Sir," he said, "I find myself maligned
On Earth. I own a soul—in limits proper—
Sensitive, generous, and no more blind
To finer things than you, my good grasshopper."

The Acrididian minstrel stretched one wing
To preen its veinous glister with a smile:
And smiled again—as though some subtle thing
Had slipped his memory for a little while;
And then he skipped a note and shook his head:
"You should have thought of that last winter," he said.

Robert Wolf

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The Passing of the Heirloom

I

O BETTER far that none should know
A daisy, cool and slim,
A wren, a cloud, a locust tree,
Could make a fool of him.

He used to lie upon the hearth,
And dream. On either side,
From faded frames they stared him down
Sternly, ashen-eyed. . . .

Like his sires he drilled his men.
. . . . One night in May,
His mind set out for blue-grass meadows,
Miles and miles away.

The hills were clouds of locust bloom,
The clouds were hills of light,
The drilling field lay cold between
Him and the pike, hot-white.

Through his brain, a steady tread. . .
He put a bullet in his head.

II

Tell him, tell him, cherry tree
Shading that white hair;
Tell the Colonel, withered weeds
Around his cane chair:

"Lift your glass with father's pride,
Call him yet your own:
'He died in line of duty,
Cause unknown.'"

Forsaken Garden

IT was enough for Lucy Lee
To see a single town;
Enough that summer follow spring
Across her father's down.

But Busybody said, "Ah me!
The years do shrivel so,
To swing all day beneath a tree,—
To sing and sing so happily,—
Too light a heart,
To grow. . . ."

'Tis all of seven years ago
That she went through the gate:
Still the garden listens for her,
Roses, nodding, wait.
Many a hidden, singing thing
Sighs a little, wistfully,—

Ponders on the
Wonder that a
Human soul should travel so
To learn a predicate!

Apprenticed

YOU could not watch the stars grow steady
For the vivid twists of him —
Up to the haymow, into the orchard,
Out to the end of a walnut limb.

You could not hear the frogs in the hollow
For his rollicking at the bin,—
Darker, darker, just a lantern;
And a whistling out and in.

Shadowy-blue in the quiet moonlight
Lay the road to the husking-bee:
Faster than Brummel or Tam O'Shanter
Would go galloping Jim and he.

A shuddering lift, and he went running:
There was Ed by the sycamore
(Old and childless, beaten, bitter,
To bed by eight, and up by four).

The moon was full. "Heigh-O-hey-Peter!"
Jim hallooed. How you could hear
Frogs in the hollow, crickets singing,
And could see, now, all the stars there were!

For the Mother of Lydia

(At seventeen buried with her little son)

WHEN you have done with weeping,
(If that can ever be:
There will be endless weeping,
So prodigal is He!)

Think how from you, in happiness,
She took her pretty airs;
Of how she trailed her little song,
Dusting down the stairs;

Of fitful days with silver seams
Of dreaming by the brook,—
Kiss her, and remember
The girl her father took.

Josephine Pollitt

New England, 1865

HOW dared they take the sunshine when they went
Southbound along my Northern roads, all bent
To find in service of the blue-coat glory,
And found a grave marked by no grave-stone story,
Or—"Here one fell from some lost regiment"?

They had my sunshine stored in heart and hand
Stolen from valley and from harsh upland,
Poured wastefully and gaily at Bull Run.
Before the first year of the war was done
I saw my sunless farms grow gray and stand

Lifeless beside the once-gay roads I knew.
The lads who marched in their bright coats of blue
Were, life by life, my heart-blood draining south.
I felt the crescent pangs of a great drouth
Of life and youth that I could not renew.

They marched, the sunshine stealers, under arms
Gay—laughing at the call of wild alarms!
(Oh, life-blood, life-blood draining from my heart!)
Proud of the way they played a brave man's part,
I can't forget my sunny upland farms!

W. H. R.

Doom

ALWAYS I see her standing in the wind,
A little figure etched against the skies;
Her skirts and hair blown back as trees are swayed
Lightly; her form quite still; resigned, afraid,
A far Fate-wisdom saddening her face,
And a wide loneliness within her eyes.

Mary Thro

Babies

WE make much ado about babies
And send blue-uniformed nurses
To care for the poor ones.
White-coated internes puff at cigarettes and swear
As they try to turn wizened, monkey-faced babies
Into rose-buds and apple-blossoms.

Small-eyed men with balloon tires
(And balloon stomachs)
With the air of a martyred pig
Sacrifice bright quarters and precious half dollars
To buy milk and ice for babies.
(Later. . . . behind walls. . .
They hand out hundred dollar bills with ease
For "the real stuff.")

Years later
Rose-buds and apple-blossoms metamorphose
(In unpruned orchards)
Into gnarled cradles for worms
To blight other rose-buds
And apple-blossoms.

A Negro

I MET a man:
His dark skin shone
Like a newly polished stove,
And his hair was like sheep's wool
Dipped into black ink.
This man was a poet:
He thought much,
Alone,
And he thought well:
Better than the finely featured man
Who mocked him.

Flora Bishop

The Storm

THE storm stalks like a wraith
Outside our cottage door;
Do you hear the wolf whine—
The wind across the moor?

It's well we have this house,
So sheltered, snug, and warm;
And yet, sometimes, I wish
Our love could breast the storm. . . .

Bride and Groom

THE river lies
In her bed, like a bride,
Waiting her turbulent lover:
The *tide*.

Le Baron Cooke

Monotone

GREY chimneys and grey smoke against a greyer sky,
Fog in grey layers shifting lonesomely by—
Smoke and mist and memory, only these have I.

Once the smoke was white, and the chimneys black and bold,
And the air was clean-cut, and all the light was gold;
But now a veil has drifted, and youth seems vague and old.

Dorothy Cruikshank

Puritan Dress

I HAVE a little dress:
It's black as black can be,
And even in my dreams
It comes to pester me.

I hate that little dress—
Its slinky, slippery black;
It makes me look as charming
As a conscious maniac.

It's black, it's long, it's tight!
Someday I'll split a seam
And burst right out of it,
And be myself—and beam!

Dorothy Gilbert

Quatrain

I HATE the crimson clustered hollyhock
Which grows around the house that I live in:
Its gay and joyous color seems to mock
The pallor of the dead man couched within!

Paul Francis Webster

Market Place

THERE were many Samsons in our town
Leaning on the columns night and day,
Yet their vigor brought no structure down
Tho the very stones were smoothed away;
It may be police or hunger came. . .
Or Delilahs shorn were much to blame.

Prescott Hoard

Sophist

I HAVE become a sophist: I know well
All things in life are truly laughable.
What touches me of woe, or say, despair,
Is made of nothing but the lightest air.

All tragedy, I find, is simply farce,
If left with time to take its proper course.
And all that men conveniently call trouble,
I see as but a variegated bubble.

Thus, calmly, spite of all before my ken,
I make my way among the ways of men;
Perhaps a bit disdainful of their pride,
Beneath whose flimsy top they seek to hide.

And yet write over me for epitaph:
"At what was laughable he did not laugh."

Specialization

I THINK there should be two of me:
A living soul, a Ph. D.!

Is Freedom But a Name?

IS freedom but a name to please the ear,
Spilled from the two-edged tongue of orators,
Who, for their hire, plead peace or rant for wars,
Whom gullibility delights to hear?

Is it the "presto" term of those who rule,
Who say they give, but with their hands behind them,
Whose very arts are fingered but to blind them
Who look with awe and play the part of fool?

No, it is a title from a sturdy age;
It is for one to cherish and defend;
It is for those whose nature will not bend;
It is for us our dearest heritage.

Then let whoever worthy is possess it:
Not having, we profane if we profess it.

Walter Hendricks

A Conservative

THE apple-trees there on the hill,
Gaunt frozen dancers, stiff and still,
What nimble gnomes they must have been
Before they turned to wood within!

The rooted thoughts of Jim Deweese,
Grotesque and stiff as apple-trees,
What leaping lads to whirl and skim—
Before they ossified in him!

Philip W. Furnas

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Without Flaw

(Collected Poems of H. D. Boni and Liveright, 1925.)

IT was in 1913 (a year after *Renascence*) that the poetry of H. D. first appeared. Since that time, with extreme reticence, she has published three slender books of verse and a small group of translations; and now, while she is still a young woman, all her work has been collected in one volume.

H. D. attained maturity with her first published poem—the present book reveals no steady advance in technique, because it was flawless from the beginning. Nearly everything in literature has an approximate counterpart somewhere, but no one else has ever written poetry like this:

Thou art come at length
more beautiful
than any cool god
in a chamber under
Lycia's far coast,
than any high god
who touches us not
here in the seeded grass,
aye, than Argestes
scattering the broken leaves.

Here, for once, is poetry in which form and line are treated as things intrinsic, and left clean of ornament. This poetry is as swift and final as the body of a youth.

There has been growth, nevertheless. More and more of late has H. D. explored the shaded and tortuous corridors of impulse. "Demeter"—perhaps the darkest of her poems—is as different from the earlier "Hermes of the Ways" as the pool in an unlighted grotto differs from a mountain lake. But, it is well to remember, the water in the grotto is as clear as that on the hill-top. It is our eyes that are insufficient plummets. H. D. has walked terribly near to beauty; it is well, perhaps, that she does not always speak out.

Bounded on all sides by the culture of Greece, within these limits her range is remarkable. She can carry us from the simple, miraculous picture of a sea-rose:

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petal,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf;
more precious than a wet rose,
single on a stem,
you are caught in the drift.

to the madness of Hippolyta, to whom the jagged corner of the hill was a lover's shoulder, and to the desperate cry of Phaedra:

Was she so chaste?

She can carry us from the sombre music of the dirge, "Lethe" (her greatest poem, which since I cannot quote in full I will leave untouched) to the movement and vigor of "The Helmsman" and "Charioteer." But since all of these poems are famous, I am anxious to call attention to one that did not appear in any of her previous books: "The Tribute." Here, against the background of a Grecian city, is enacted the too-recent drama of a million youths slain as a sacrifice to the greed of the elders. The clutter of the city is pierced:

Ah, squalor was cheated at last
for a bright head flung back. . . .

but the realization becomes more bitter:

Could beauty be caught and hurt
could beauty be rent with a thought,
for a thrust of a sword,
for a piece of thin money tossed up
then beauty were dead.

But in the end, she sees; and at the last, she knows that beauty is never more potent than when it is spat upon, rent asunder and trampled in blood; that violated again and again, it is inviolate; that slain again and again, it is deathless.

Could beauty be beaten out,—
O youth the cities have sent
to strike at each other's strength,
it is you have kept her alight.

To have seen this is much. To have said it is a great deal. For beauty is the salvation of the flesh, and the healing of terror.

Lindley Williams Hubbell

Retrospect: The City of Dreadful Night

VICTORIAN society was merely the chrysalis whence broke that night-moth, society today. It was not Ruskin or Carlyle, it was not Dickens or Meredith, it was not Huxley with his myopic brilliance and his fatuous faith in mechanical science, who was the Dante of that Hell. Critic and novelist, philosopher and scientist, were, as always, shallow beside the poet. The greatest, the truest, the most intense word upon our modern world came from one of the two greatest Victorian poets, James Thomson, who called our world: The City of Dreadful Night.

The City of Dreadful Night, to be sure, is psychological. Its "builded desolation and passionate despair" are but "misery dissolved in mystery," are but the intolerable suffering of Thomson's soul rendered tolerable in symbolic and sonorous art. That City which is "perchance of Death,"

"Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
Tho present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day."

The poem is an epic of the heart as purely spiritual as Dante's vision, a narrative of Thomson's wandering in the labyrinthine cycles of his own soul until at last he descends into the shadow of Dürer's Melancholia, "The Melancholia that transcends all wit."

"The moving moon and stars from East to West
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair."

If this were all, the poem would be interesting as the greatest English expression of individual pessimism, but it would appeal most to those too sensitive and happily abnormal brethren of the "sad Fraternity" whose "dolorous secrets" Thomson tells. I believe, however, that the poem has greater value: that it belongs not only to pessimistic literary individualism, but also to revolutionary art. For Thomson was, essentially, a lover of life, like the Heine whom he praised as "a joyous heathen of richest blood, a Greek, a lusty lover of this world and life, an apostle of the rehabilitation of the flesh." Many of Thomson's poems say Yea to life with a philosophy as serene as Spinoza's and as positive as Nietzsche's. He wrote, in fullest commendation, the best essay ever written on Walt Whitman. He was a pessimist who sought the fountain of Death (as eagerly as Ponthez De Leon sought the fountain of Eternal Youth) only because he was a vital spirit beaten and broken by a society that denied life. James Thomson was a flamingo that had to wear crêpe because the times were sad; a brilliant leopard in Hell.

The best commentary on *The City of Dreadful Night* is its prose sister, *A Lady of Sorrow*. And there, describing the majestic and terrible pageant of life and of death, Thomson says: "But where I stand reviewing the spectral march . . . it is not daybreak, it is not morning . . . it is deep perfect night. Where I stand, absorbed, astonished, dismayed, overwhelmed, the legions are traversing a vast desert moorland above which hover gross yellow meteors, upon which swell endless ranges of rock-wall and immense gloomy mounds, athwart which the broad road portends straight and level from world's end to world's end." Compare with this the tremendous poetry of the fourth section of the *City*. . . .

"As I came thru the desert thus it was,
As I came thru the desert: All was black,
In Heaven no single star, on earth no track;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
And thus for hours; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came thru the desert thus it was,
As I came thru the desert: Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came thru the desert thus it was,
 As I came thru the desert: Lo you, there,
 That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
 Those myriad dusky flames with points aglow
 Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;
 A Sabbath of the serpents, heaped pell-mell.
 For Devil's roll-call and some fête of Hell:
 Yet I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came thru the desert thus it was,
 As I came thru the desert: Meteors ran
 And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span;
 The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
 The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame;
 The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
 And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged:
 Yet I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear."

As we read these lines, we should remember Dickens' *Hard Times*, and Josiah Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind and the mills of Coketown; the sombre austere indignation of Ruskin; the *Song of the Children*; Carlyle's *Past and Present*, and the poor woman who proved her sisterhood with the rich by infecting them with typhus fever: we should remember, in short, capitalism in Thomson's England, and the society it mis-created. *The City of Dreadful Night* may have been Thomson's soul: but that soul was only a mirror in Hell.

And there is other evidence. Two great men have given us their ideas of Thomson's doom—George Meredith and Frank Harris. Meredith wrote, "It is my opinion that in consideration of his high and singularly elective mind, he might have worked clear of it. . . . if circumstances had been smoother and brighter about him." Frank Harris wrote, "For the greater part of the 19th century the majority of men went about without souls in drear discomfort. . . . The greatest poets were in all countries the most convinced pessimists: Leopardi in Italy, Heine in Germany, and Thomson in England. Their souls had been maimed and wounded in the sordid struggle."

And indeed if you were a prose critic of power unsurpassed in your generation, and the greatest contemporary poet of a great country, you might well feel that you dwelt in a City of Dreadful Night when you were dismissed as an army school-master simply for being a man; when for the best years of your life you could get only one poem into any of the great reviews; when you could make, by immortal writings, only ten dollars a week to keep your body (not to speak of your soul) alive in the city of London, so terrible

to the poor. Here is a picture of the poet in modern society: "His raiment had the worn and soiled and deeply creased aspect that suggested. . . . it had been worn night and day. The day, for May, was a raw and cold one, and the feet of the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* were protected from the slushy streets only by a pair of thin old carpet slippers so worn and defective that, in one part, they displayed his bare skin."

The City of Dreadful Night was not merely Thomson's soul: it was his England: it is our society today.

For this reason, it is not surprising that professors of English and other old-maids omit Thomson from their text-books for the Babes and Sucklings of Literature. Heine well wrote,

"Doch die Castraten klagten
Als ich meine Stimm' erhob;
Sie klagten, und sie sagten:
Ich sange viel zu grob.

Ever the eunuchs whimpered
When I sang out with force;
They whimpered, and they simpered:
My singing was much too coarse."

But why is it that free spirits and "dauntless rebels the world over" neglect this revolutionary poet who damned our pseudo-civilization as *The City of Dreadful Night*?

To be sure, Thomson may have despaired too personally. We believe, today, that capitalism with its "gross yellow meteors" and "immense gloomy mounds" is but an unprofitable episode. . . . We know that Zarathustra has shaken old moralities with his transvaluation of values. . . . We understand that the mechanical science of Darwin and Huxley and Spencer was but a professor's caricature of creative evolution. . . . We are gay pessimists, who trust: "There is more day to dawn. The Sun is but a morning star."

Thus tho our bodies dwell in the City of Dreadful Night, we have seen Samson between its pillars, and we greet the dawn even among ruins. Justice indeed thunders condemnation, and better cities are in birth.

But let us not, in our Cities of the Dawn, forget James Thomson—that brave spirit and great poet caged in the City of Dreadful Night!

E. Merrill Root

Contributors

ROBERT WOLF, as most of us know already, is one of the foremost of our younger poets.

JOSEPHINE POLLITT has the shyness of the true poet, in spite of which we are sometimes privileged to publish her poems distinguished for their music, imagination, and reality.

MARY THRO writes from Jeffersonville, Indiana. This is her first published poem.

W. H. R. has been Fellow at Cambridge, England, and travelled in Germany. He is a teacher-elect of German in Wesleyan College, Middletown, Connecticut.

DOROTHY CRUIKSHANK is the writing-name of Mrs. Dorothy Cruikshank Cochran of New York City. Her poems have appeared in *The Lyric* and in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.

FLORA BISHOP is a social worker in Chicago. Her poems have appeared in *The Wanderer*. Her fancy transmutes her warm humanity into art.

LE BARON COOKE is a resident of Boston and a native of Maine. His poetry has been accepted by many of the leading magazines: *Pearson's*, *The Survey*, *The Smart Set* (under Mencken), *Asia*, *The Double Dealer*, etc. He is represented in Braithwaite's latest anthology by the poem "Question."

PRESCOTT HOARD is well known to readers of *The Measure* for his cryptic originality and sharp beauty of perception.

PAUL FRANCIS WEBSTER, tho only eighteen, has published a volume.

DOROTHY GILBERT is a young poet who lives in Ohio. She has not published as many poems yet as she will.

We introduced WALTER HENDRICKS in our last issue.

PHILIP W. FURNAS has travelled in Serbia and Ireland. He is a teacher, and is at present taking advanced work at Harvard.

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